

Inner Refuge: Identity and the Enduring Quest for Physical- Spiritual Unity

" اللجوء الداخلي: الهوية والسعي الدائم نحو الوحدة الجسدية الروحية "

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to analyze the inner spiritual rebellion of Doris Betts's female characters in their struggle to discover their identities. They use four strategies: going West in *Heading West*(1981) and *The Sharp Teeth of Love*(1998), imagining illusions in *The Sharp Teeth of Love*, resorting to religion in *The Astronomer*(1973) and welcoming death in *Souls Raised from the Dead*(1994). The study examines how Betts's female characters succeed in their heroic struggle to achieve the homogeneity of their physical-spiritual identity. This reveals that Betts's women drip from the outer selfish physical world into an emotional mystical world as their final resort. The study proposes Betts's use of the second wave feminism- that the American Southern women writers are famous for at that time- from the 1960s till the 1990. The study traces the cultural inequalities, gender, and the role of women in the society as three aspects of the second wave feminism.

Keywords: Identity, Spirituality, Waves of Feminism, Illusion, Religion, Death.

Introduction

The psychology in regard to inner personality identification is one of the most targeted agendas in literature. This study investigates the character struggle and identity loss that happen in unprecedented and unexpected ways. The growing developments in the fields of technology and social media and the struggles in the fields of religion, economy, politics and culture in various parts of the world have markedly intensified identity conflict. Many writers all over the world are affected by this; chief among them is the American author Doris Betts who brilliantly foregrounds this thematic preoccupation. This study mainly focusses on the work of Doris Betts that deals with two main, intertwined concepts that cannot be separated in her writings—namely, feminist ideas and the quest for identity. They are pronounced in almost every female character in her works.

As a southern American writer, Betts focuses on second-wave feminism as one of the main thematic preoccupations in her fiction since this topic was one of the distinguishing hallmarks of the culture and Literature that reflected it: “Omission of the South from narratives of second-wave feminism has become all the more inexplicable as studies of feminist activism have become more voluminous and more nuanced” (Keane 5). Consequently, the study traces the second-wave feminism in Doris Betts’s women from 1960s to 1990s, the period of the works being discussed in the research. Wilson explores the importance of the second-wave feminism at that time saying:

The new women's movement that arose in the late 1960s and early 1970s in most Western countries was not the first feminist movement in history. The term 'second-wave feminism' has been attached to the

new movement to indicate that we are witnessing the second peak of a feminist movement that has existed for more than 100 years, ever since the second half of the nineteenth century. (Wilson 8)

In order to trace the second- wave feminism, it is significant to define feminism first. Feminism is “a movement that aims at advocating the rights of women and achieving political, social, economic, cultural, and civil equality with men” (Elliot 2016). It also calls for the liberation of women and the cessation of their historic oppression. Similarly, feminists reject all sorts of discrimination against women, including the sexual and academic supremacy, the depriving of voting for women in elections or confining women’s role to domestic roles like childcare (Nakhla 2019). The concept of Feminism is very old while it got more attention in the 15th century with Christine de Pizan’s *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), in which she asserts the importance of women in society. Later on, feminist philosophy appears in the 18th century in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft. After that, literary theory appears in the works of women writers in the 19th century such as George Eliot and Margaret Fuller (Kaplan 514). According to the feminist theory in the second half of the 19th century, feminist writings gain more fame through seminal works like *The Scarlet letter* (1850) by Nathaniel Hawthorne and in the 20th century such as *Votes for Women* (1901) by Mark Twain and *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) by Virginia Woolf greatly advanced the cause. Feminists also began to raise anti-patriarchal issues that are related to the restrictions and censorship of women's writings (Sturgeon, 2016).

Jill M. Swirsky and D.J. Angelone argue that feminism appears to confirm social, political, and economic equality between men and women. “Feminisms maintain three general ideologies: (1) the need to recognize and disseminate the historical

exploitation, devaluing, and oppression of women; (2) the goal of improving women's social standing while working toward equality for all genders; and (3) the active criticism of traditional intellectual pursuits and gender ideologies" (1). Feminism calls for the liberation of women and the cessation of their historic oppression. It rejects all sorts of discrimination against women, including the sexual and academic supremacy, the depriving of voting for women in elections, or confining women's role in domestic roles. Jill M. Swirsky and D.J. Angelone explain the role of feminism in society saying:

Feminisms work to correct the social gender imbalance, necessitating women's continued self-identification as feminists. There are several reasons noted for women choosing to identify: (1) exposure to feminist beliefs through education, (2) personal influences such as strong feminist role models, and (3) awareness of gender discrimination. The feminist movement works to end the social dominance of women and supports gender equality in social, political, and economic arenas. (Swirsky 1)

Elizabeth Wilson goes beyond this definition: "Feminism embodies many theories rather than being a single discrete theory, and rather than being a politically coherent approach to the subordination of women, is a political commitment - or in some of its forms more an ethical commitment - to giving women their true value" (8). Chris Beasley states that feminism is a response to misogyny, the challenge of women's subordinate status as second-rate or not-man and the claims of men's universality (3-8). On the other hand, some writers are against the ideas of feminism: "In Germany feminism is openly socialistic"; the Daily Chronicle

shuddered in 1908, and went on to dismiss out of hand ‘suffragists, suffragettes and all the other phases in the crescendo of feminism’. In those years, some writers used an alternative term – ‘womanism’ – with the same hostility” (Walters 1). Margaret Walters goes on explaining how some famous women writers like Virginia Woolf attacked feminism:

One of the sharpest attacks on the word ‘feminism’ came from Virginia Woolf, whose *A Room of One’s Own* is such an effective and engaging plea for women. In *Three Guineas*, written in 1938 in the shadow of fascism and of approaching war, and probably nervous about any ‘-ism’, she rejects the word out of hand. No one word can capture the force ‘which in the nineteenth century opposed itself to the force of the fathers’, she insists, continuing: ‘Those nineteenth-century women were in fact the advance guard of your own movement. They were fighting the tyranny of the patriarchal state as you are fighting the tyranny of the Fascist state’. (Walters 2)

Feminism progresses over the decades while women develop their rights and duties. Margaret Walters defines Feminism movements stating: “Over the centuries, and in many different countries, women have spoken out for their sex, and articulated, in different ways, their complaints, their needs, and their hopes” (2), while Aikau, Hokulani K., and others display: “We use ... feminist waves as a metaphor for the movement and relocation of theories, politics, methods, and ways of knowing across time and place” (3). On the other hand, Jeannina Perez is against dividing feminism into waves. She stresses how “—soft consciousness-raising novels of the first, second and third-waves of feminism practice underground feminism by covertly exposing women’s socio-political issues

outside of the confines of feminist rhetoric” (ii). This study goes with the other supporting opinion as it supports the ideas of Betts’s selected writings.

Although Betts sometimes seems anti-feminist in her opinions in the interviews and letters to her friend, yet all her women characters are under some sort of inequality, suffering, and oppression from men in their life struggling in their search for their female identities. This study analyzes Betts’s women characters in their journey towards identity stability from a feminist point of view. Laura Gillman states the difficulty of defining feminist identity:

...there is no fixed, universalizing biological essence, nor are there socio-cultural patterns of conduct, activities, or structures of feeling that bind all women together as a group. Whether celebrating women’s biological traits or social attributes in order to compensate for racist and patriarchal representations, or simply deconstructing the mind/nature dichotomy, in order to dismantle Western binary thought that marginalized women in the first place, feminists, so the argument goes, had mistakenly reproduced stereotypical femininity. They had indulged either in an over attentiveness to naturalized conceptualizations of the body or in the celebration of historicized and abstract stereotypical attributes, such as nurturing and caring. (2)

Gillman justifies the importance of identity “...as a necessary mechanism for developing reliable knowledge; I posit that identities serve as the justification for our decision and meaning-making procedures as well as political action” (3). She goes on saying that defining feminist identity leads to social and behavioral roles: “...all attempts to define a gendered identity trigger normative roles or behaviors to

which women must conform (2). To go deeper into Betts's female identity, it is significant to explain the four waves of feminism.

Critics like Julia Kristeva typically divide feminism into four stages: The first wave (1830's – early 1900's) centered on Women's fight for equal contract and property rights. It focused on overturning legal inequalities, particularly addressing issues of women's suffrage. The second wave (the 1960s–1980s) broadened the debate to include cultural inequalities, gender norms, and the role of women in society generally. Third-wave feminism (the 1990s–2000s) focused on diverse strains of feminist activity both as a continuation of the second wave and as a response to its perceived failures, especially the “micropolitics” of gender equality (Stein). The Fourth-wave feminism, which started in 2008, continues into the present day. In *All the Rebel Women: The Rise of the Fourth Wave of Feminism*, Kira Cochrane defines fourth-wave feminism as “a movement that is connected through technology” (Cochrane 1).

The second concept in this study, the quest for identity, is an enduring and universal thematic preoccupation in literature. The massive changes all over the world substantially contribute to the identity conflict and the inept and wrong-headed desire to define the human self in relation to the caprices of inner and outer whims and trends.

The quest for identity is related to the need for a home, a community to belong to, and an existence to fight for. The feminist definition of identity is usually stated as the provision of all the basic rights of humans without discrimination of gender from social, professional, and personal perspectives. It incorporates people's understanding of themselves and others, their communication with their peer

groups, and their reflection towards others and towards themselves. Identity invariably relates to the question “who am I” in terms of community, position, religion, history, language, morals, and even relation to the self and others.

Amid the vast and often impersonal communication of the larger world, the individual faces different ways of life, staggeringly different traditions, and a stunning array of varied beliefs from diverse societies. As a result of this open world, the individual is confused and loses his/her sense of belonging. That is why he/she is forced to make choices and preferences. New experiences, values, cultures, and origins conflate to create new complex and richly intricate identities.

Yael Tamir speaks to this phenomenon in her book *The Quest for identity*:

The quest for identity reveals the importance of being a member, but not just of being a member of any group, or of a group one was born in, but being a member of the group, one would like to be a member of (Ferguson, 2017). It illuminates the fact that the search for identity may lead individuals to follow many avenues, some might affirm their inherent affiliations and traditions, others may remain within their community of origin but strive to change its ways or choose to leave their social group and opt for membership in a new one. These various paths embody choice and rootedness which are characteristics of the duality inherent in modern individuality. (190)

Allen Weelis in his book *The Quest for Identity* (1958), on the other hand, looks at the implications and consequences of accelerating social change and shows how the decline of the superego, the diminished unconscious, and the undermining of traditional values have caused new patterns of personal unrest. He believes that

man's old identity was not lost, but outgrown, and that, therefore, identity is not to be found; it is to be created and achieved in order to endure in our time. Vanita Mahailescu in her essay, "Liberalism Nationalism Identity," divides identity into interactional Identity; Relationalism: priority to the community, social rules, relation with the other, apparent, outer self, and Essential Identity; Essentialism, individual focus, secret, desire, power, inner self (21).

Both previously discussed concepts are prevalent in the writings of Doris Betts (1932-2012). This study analyzes her writings in the light of these concepts. Critics often compare Betts to Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy because of the deceptively simple style of writing and the philosophical conflicts of the characters. But Betts's characters, according to Marie Mullins, are "Ordinary and extraordinary. Most people certainly have had the feeling that there is within their very ordinary looking and acting self a more unique being, a truer and more courageous spirit waiting to be freed" (113). Betts's characters, as noted above, achieve their spiritual- physical unities and create their identities' security by going west, resorting to faith, imagining illusions, and welcoming death. These varied strategies require additional elucidation in light of second- wave analysis.

Second Wave Theory and Doris Betts's work

Jennifer Martin argues that: "Roles for southern women remained rooted in nostalgia for ideologies that dominated American culture through the Cold War, privileging a stay-at-home, angel-in-the-house mother as the pinnacle of achievement for privileged, white women in the 1980s" (1). The idea of the housewife serving her children and husband was the prevailing thought for the best societal role for women at that time of the American history. That is why the ideas

of the second wave of feminism penetrate the southern writings during the 1960s till 1980s as a reflection against the anti-feminist thoughts prevalent in the American culture at that time. Katarina Keane confirms the impact of the second-wave of feminism on America: “In the late 1960s and 1970s, second-wave feminism transformed American society, creating new legal rights for women, remaking gender roles, and altering women’s position in the economy” (1).

Doris Betts explains the uncomfortable experience of women having many roles in their families and in their societies facing conflicting identities as housewives who belong to their families and as individuals who want to achieve their stability as independent women. “For Betts, maternal ambivalence also encompasses the tension between motherhood and work; motherhood and self-definition; and motherhood and feminism” (Martin 31).

According to the general definition, and the explanation of the second-wave theory of feminism, the suffering of women or any particular individual in regard to the societal mind-set is generic while the people who have been suffering from the societal norms affect their mindsets. The lead characters of the novel *the sharp teeth of love* have also been suffering from the norms of the society while the lead characters consistently try to read the world from the millennium approaches to understand their connections with the world. It is hard for the society to accept exceptions and changes while the people who suffer from these changes without having a choice try hard to fit into the society although the unsupportive nature does not allow them to do that.

The other works of Doris Betts also support the same arguments and fathom the depth of the movements and agendas that were raised during the movements

related to feminism. In *Souls Raised from the Dead* Doris Betts shows the struggle of the young teenager in southern fiction. The family struggle includes the norms that were targeted in the second-wave theory while Doris smoothly settles the storyline while following these features. The work of Betts includes multiple aspects of human behavior while many of them include features that were the direct target of the second-wave theory of feminism. Numerous points have been addressed in selected novels and works; these points shed light on the societal issues that were the primary objectives of second-wave feminism.

Betts was hesitant in the beginning to adopt the ideas of the second-wave feminism as she was convinced by the feminist theorist Jennifer Nedelsky who declares the impossibility of adopting feminist ideas while being a mother bringing up children and taking care of a family: "...having my two children is the best thing that ever happened to me. As a woman who came of age in the sixties and became active as a feminist in 1970, it seems embarrassing, even shocking, to write such a sentence in a public, feminist essay" (304).

The conflict between the ideas of second-wave feminism and the conservative ideas about women who must be only housewives is reflected in Betts's works. Doris Betts's life shows the contradicting identities inside her; as a devoted wife and mother and as a liberal feminist independent woman and a famous writer. Her works reflect the two conflicting identities in her; as a family member and as a liberal feminist. Sometimes she supports the traditional southern woman devoted to her family and other times she presents liberal women following second-wave feminist movement. In Betts's works, women always suffer the inner conflict between being a mother or a wife and achieving success outside home. This suffering is reflected on their children and families. Betts's women often fail as

mothers and housewives from the communal standards and they judge them severely the matter that affect their personalities passively and lead to their disappointments. Betts's fictional women struggle hard to achieve stable identities using four strategies which are clear in her works:

Going West: (*Heading West and the Sharp Teeth of Love*)

The feminist ideas that a woman could develop a presence in the community outside the home and define herself by her own interests in lieu of proving her worth by providing comforts to her husband and children were a revolutionary departure from southern traditional ideas about a woman's place in the family that kept women confined to affairs of .. childrearing. (Martin 3)

As Martin explains, Betts's women revolt against their presence and move making new beginnings in order to prove their feminist identities. Doris Betts judges southern women of the American Western Myth. In the main, Betts condemns the social and cultural boundaries of the South, since those Southern traditions deprive Southern women of their independence. Doris Betts's characters refuse their original Southern societies with their painful present and longingly look to Western cities with their hopeful future, thereby reviving the notion of the American Western frontiers—that is, the old Wild West. Through the freedom which the Old West offers, Betts's women find their own liberty and independence and discover their own new identities. Doris Betts's female characters move from the impoverished, conservative South to the richer, more liberal West with its new values and concepts and broader horizons; since in many countries, it is not uncommon for people to move from poor places to the richer big cities in search of

better facilities, money, and comfort, and a higher standard of life generally (Black 2019; Nakhla 2019). Similarly, Betts's Southern women run to the West to start a new life that achieves their feminist identities:

Betts's southern women escape the South and create a new life in the West which fires their imaginary world. They try to integrate themselves with the new community of the West which is vastly superior to their culturally stultified and societally stifling lives of the old decaying South. Restrained Southern women escape to the liberal West, rebelling against their traditional Southern social boundaries and longing for more freedom and rights in an attempt to reform their own mangled female identities and rebuild their destroyed and greatly compromised inner identities. (Black, 2019)

In this way, the southern women search for their own unique personalities amid the smoking rubble of languishing dreams, burnt-out hopes, and failed aspirations (Code, 2018). Only in the new places does one fully appreciate the values of the old, recall with clarity and new understanding that former existence, and critically and intelligently evaluate it through the lens of the new, pulsating environment. Because Doris Betts's characters are regional, they differ from one place to another. Betts's women see Western women as ideal because they embody the wilder, stronger, freer, unrestrained, and unfeminine. Betts states in *Heading*:

They had no interest in clothes, wore their hair cropped, slept late on Sunday mornings while we were putting on our pretty little hats and waiting for the bus to go to Sunday schools. I was frightened to death of them, but I envied them, too, because along with their life, saving badges, they seemed to have earned some magic exemption

from the fate the college clearly had in mind for most of us, it wanted to turn us Southern girls into Southern ladies. (185)

Predictably, Betts's southern women automatically inherit their well-honed domestic identities. That is why they need to be powerful and take the initiative to decide, to re-fashion, or, most ideally, to flee their claustrophobic Southern lives. But separating from that Southern existence is never easy. They suffer from spiritual conflicts between leaving their homes and families and going west for freedom and liberty, but nevertheless, they are forced to leave by men. Betts' characters are prisoners of domestic affairs that they wish to leave. Their families and friends exploit them spiritually and physically, but they refuse this just as Nancy does in the novel *Heading West* (1981). In this novel, she finds an outlet, ironically, in Dwight's captivity because Nancy has such a strong desire to leave domestic responsibilities. Instead of feeling imprisoned by captivity, she, paradoxically, feels released.

Her kidnapper, Dwight promises to let her go to Arizona, and she plans to escape him, her family, and the South and to stay in a new place. She turns her captivity into a chance for a new life and an exciting change, which, in turn, precipitate and foster a welcoming, new identity. Betts clearly prefers the primitive wild place as a new resort for her female characters who search for independence rather than secure femininity and entrenched domesticity. After the death of Dwight, Nancy realizes that she was not captive by him but by home. "All that time I was running but running away from home" (297).

After the captivity journey, Nancy returns home stronger than before. Refusing domestic duties, she becomes a new stronger personality who revolts against any obstacles towards the formation of her new self. She even decides to sell her dear grandfather's land to use the money for traveling. She no longer ties herself with any familial boundaries, and the story ends in a triumphant crescendo as she achieves both her Western dream and her new female identity.

In *The Sharp Teeth of Love* (1998), Luna finds rescue in her husband's journey to California. Betts shows another form of captivity by the husband. Moving West after her husband's desire for migration, Luna can't control her own life or make her own decisions. In this regard, she is like many of Betts's characters who are looking for spiritual stability through physical movement. When they change neighborhoods, societal construction, and the domestic world, they fashion a new history and civilization which will create new identities. Betts's characters, who move to the West in search of a spiritual gap in their personality, exemplify this tendency. Through searching for spirituality, they find what is lacking in their identities: "Luna has tried since college to find a sense of herself, and only in ditching the fiancé who is as controlling as her father is, she able to launch that search in earnest" (Eads 39).

Luna presents many feminist ideas in her life. She rejects the controlling relation with her fiancé who used to refer to his beauty and attractive blue eyes to disappoint her and feed her inferiority as less beautiful than him. In this way, he gains control over her.

Luna sat thinking that she had probably not flirted with strangers since before her days as a patient in the hospital that the doctors there had cured her of flirting. Unlike bicycle riding, the skill had not come

back to her. Steven had knocked on her door with his looks; she would never have tried to attract him on her own. If Steven had come downstairs that very minute, still worm from bed and fixed those blue eyes on her, she would have reassured him on the spot. *Forsaking all others till death do us apart.* (Sharp 38)

Luna's relation with her father, Major Stone, also shows the rejection of male dominance over her. Luna refused to accept her father's authority forcing her to marry her fiancé or even to send her to the 'fat-girls camp in Vermont'. "Dad sent for Steven Grier. What the hell for? For control, I guess. He always said that he'd learned in the army that all men are animals, and yet he reserved the right to choose the best animal for me. He thinks I've gone off the deep end" (250). Luna here rejects male control either from her father to choose her husband or from her fiancé to control her. She also criticizes the way men think they can control women through beauty; 'blue eyes' or in declaring their 'animal' identity as her father said. Yet, Luna here stops male control over her through moving away to a new place and being a mother.

In this way, Betts's female characters find positive power in being mothers and achieving identity. Lauri Unmansky, a historian, states that second –wave feminists focuses on motherhood as “a positive force.” Luna could achieve herself through escaping the patriarchal views of motherhood and moving to the West but enjoying the power of being a mother by her own choice. Unlike Betts's other stories, Luna achieves identity stability through being adopting mother to Sam:

Sam hid while the ranger and I had our discussion. Afterward I had to call him from behind the boulder. “So where shall we go?” The stare

he gave me! The mix of its doubt, accusation, surprise, all over nothing but the one pronoun: we. “Sam, I told you I wouldn’t leave you.” “I can look after myself.” “So can I, but we get along OK, don’t we? So let’s don’t leave each other yet. I do hate to leave Tamsen, though.” *Could* I leave her?... “So it’s settled. You’ve got all the tourist stuff-so where should we go next?” ... “Desolation Wilderness,” he finally said. (*Sharp* 124)

Luna feels responsibility towards Sam. He fills her desire to be a shelter and protection to somebody. With Sam she feels she is important and valuable different from the unappreciation and inferiority she feels with Steve. Luna realized her need to be respected and loved. Luna fulfills Sam’s need of a refuge and Sam fulfills Luna’s need of identity. Betts chooses the West a liberal place for Luna to practice her own special womanhood without the help of any man and enjoying the feminist ideas of the second-wave feminism. Luna chooses her own family members, decides her own family rules and her own social norms with complete woman independence different from the southern societal conventional control over her. After that, Luna could be able to feel the attention care of people around her and to return their passion which represents the born of a healthy new self that is able to love and be loved. “It’s not about economics, either. I think I can keep on loving Paul. ...And here is something else I think, Mother. I think now that love isn’t something that happens to you. It’s something you decide to do” (327).

Betts often compares Southern women to Western women. In her novels, she presents Southern women as undesirable because they are passive, weak, and defenseless. Their daughters, not surprisingly, are, at best, emotionally stunted, and, at worst, emotionally disabled. On the contrary, Western women are good

models of mothers, wives, and daughters. They are strong, powerful, positive, decisive, and they bravely face their problems and aggressively solve them. They accomplish through their own defined and self-fashioned identities. They are motivated to smoothly adapt to life changes and to greet the future with flamboyantly open arms. Obviously, they have more freedom than Southern women (Nakhla 2019).

On the other hand, southern women's identities are deeply affected because of their disconnection from the South. The old identities do not die easily, and those entrenched ways of thinking and behaving linger in the recesses of the mind. Thus, for these women to create their new identities, out of the ashes of the old, they face a formidable task. The taproot of the past is rarely completely pulled away from yesterday's soil. Thus, the best alternative for them is to create new personalities that subtly blend the desirable attributes of East and West. But then, it is a delicate mix and it is difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, Betts's successful women navigate these vagaries nobly and heroically.

Imagining Illusions: (*the Sharp Teeth of Love*)

Jennifer Martin explains the lack of varieties in front of the southern women which could lead her to psychological sufferings in order to achieve an imaginary identity that she cannot achieve in the oppressed society:

... feminism was not a topic to be discussed among the polite company of southern society. Fiction, however, gives voice to the unspoken interior lives of women who outwardly appear to be in compliance with community expectations. The fiction of Betts, ... uses characterization, point of view, inner dialogue, and life narratives

to demonstrate the limited choices that are available for women and women's responses to these constraints. (5)

Doris Betts's women are mysterious characters. Although they appear to be clear and simple-minded, they experience many conflicts and internal perplexities. This internal conflict is one of the characteristics of the second-wave feminist women who must choose between their family and achieving the self. Of course, they try to understand the complexities of the modern world, but most of the time they cannot. The world's reality encroaches upon the rise of the fragile new, inner identity. They want to create their own stable identities, but they find that challenge daunting and often overwhelming. Because Doris Betts's women are unable to achieve physical-spiritual unity, in reality, they resort to the imagination. Luna in *The Sharp Teeth of Love* is a good example. Because she cannot cope with her unbearable husband, she creates a new person in her own fertile imagination, Tamsen Donner. After hearing the story of the Donner Party, she hikes to Donner Lake State Park. There Luna rejects Tamsen's loyalty to her husband.

Stayed behind for love? Self-Sacrifice? Stupidity? Like Luna, Tamsen Donner had come to his place the long way around, had lived in North Carolina, too, had taught school there at Elizabeth City on the Pasquotank River. From that land of fish and duck hunting and Dismal Swamp she had ended up here in the blizzards, and one man had eaten her time and her strength and her nursing care while another one had possibly eaten her flesh. (74)

Luna, nevertheless, finds a similarity between her and Tamsen. Her husband, Steven, also lives on her flesh by letting her pay for everything. Steven also gains weight while she lost weight the matter that lets her think he took her lost flesh;

“She had lost weight again since Steven moved in...she might have asked Steven why he had gained the pounds she had been gradually shedding” (34). That quotation symbolizes that Luna is being misused by her husband. It refers to the rejection of Betts’s feminist characters to be exploited by any male characters; children, husbands or fathers. Luna’s fierce need for achieving her own identity leads to a case of illusion: she imagines that Tamsen’s ghost comes to her and encourages her to leave Steven and travel. Luna learns from the ghost who melts inside her to be the opposite: “No wonder that Tamsen could stay and die while I could leave and live” (84). Through comparing herself to Tamsen, Luna decides to choose her own life and fate. Then Luna could wake up from this illusion into reality by imagining herself a mother to a stranger Sam: “I had daydreamed of finding a man with his book, but Kafka? Too much. Almost alarming...I left my, my son at a campsite by the lake and thought this was it” (132).

Luna runs away from Steven and meets Sam and Paul who are also searching for refuge from gangs. In this way, Luna forms a new family which she likes, even though they are all lost selves. Still, she talks in a healthy way breaking her life of silence, and she finds her happiness only when she finds a suitable company. “The mere sight of them – of the three of us, really . . . cheered me up completely” (137). As this example shows, Betts’s women need understanding, love, and respect. With a real company, Luna enjoys not only talking but also being listened to. “Oh, how I liked the attentive way Paul would listen as if every pore of his skin had an eardrum in it” (150). Luna’s new identity helps her to rescue Sam after cooperation with Paul’s dealing with criminals.

Luna is changed into a stronger woman who is able to face monstrously evil people. When Luna moves to the new place getting rid of the two male authorities controlling her life, she could be able to gain weight and achieve female independence as a strong step towards realizing identity. She creates a new strong identity that is able to decide for her life, to return love and live happily. She talks with her new lover, Paul, in a decisive strong personality knowing what she wants: “I don’t want to start over, I want to start new”. “I don’t want even to see my father again” (280). Yet, Luna is still suffering from illusions imagining the existence of Tamsen as an oracle who helps her bringing up Sam and rejecting any male dominance in return “You think I couldn’t manage to raise Sam all by myself?” “Is that the best for Sam? To say nothing of you and me? ... Luna said if she stayed in Reno she could consult Tamsen all the time, like an oracle” (280).

Betts’s women here prove that they do not run away from family ties or reject responsibilities. What they oppose is the way people make use of them or exploit them. When they find care and unselfish love, they settle comfortably and manage to find their lost self through emotional fulfillment. Luna’s mother, Priscilla, is an excellent example of a Southern woman who enslaves herself under domestic responsibilities forever and who is unable to claim her own life and identity. A captive of her own making, Priscilla suffers from her husband’s infidelity and leaves her for younger girls. Yet she encourages Luna to marry Steven, even though she suspects he will do the same. “Maybe I even believed Steven Grier would leave Madeline (Luna) someday for a young graduate student” (321). The mother here not only causes, her failure but, unwittingly, facilitates her daughter’s horrific captivity.

Paul's mother, Mrs. Cowan, unlike Luna's mother, is strong and positive. She helps Luna to face her family and to be stronger than before. The novel ends with Luna moving west, where she fashions her new acceptable family, marries Paul and raises Sam. She deliberately chooses this family which is full of understanding and true love.

Resorting to Religion: (*the Astronomer, the Ugliest Pilgrimage*)

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12-2). Nothing expresses Doris Betts's characters and their internal conflicts more effectively and succinctly than this Bible's verse. Betts consistently maintained that the Bible was the sole reason behind her wanting to be a novelist because “It makes you feel that the ordinary is not ordinary” (Betts *Everything I*). Doris Betts claimed that religion and its principles may help to mitigate the frustration and materialistic life of Capitalism in America.

Betts qualifies and even contradicts the common vision spread about religious principles which typically restrict freedom and independence. She even rejects the idea that religious communities go against the intellectual, social, artistic, and political progress.

Doris Betts's writing is deeply informed by her religious sensibility, not in a dogmatic or didactic sense, but in the way, she asks important questions about good and evil, life and death, and people's responses to these heady questions. The biblical story of Job's much-tried faith could be considered a touchstone for Betts since her fiction concerns similar trials in the 20th-century South, particularly

North Carolina. Her earliest work tends to probe these philosophical questions in a somewhat systematic fashion, as in "Mr. Shawn and Father Scott" and in her first collection of short stories, *The Gentle Insurrection*. But four decades later in her novel, *Souls Raised from the Dead*, Betts's mature insights and highly developed techniques make her work incandescent with wisdom about the human condition (Evans Home1).

Betts's characters are spiritually different, trying to solve mysteries of faith and to make sense out of their lives. They are asking unanswerable philosophical questions as Susan Ketchin says: "They don't ask 'why is there something instead of nothing?' Rather, they are asking 'How do I live in the something that is?' They are asking 'What must I do to make sense of it?' They are absurd not because of what they lack but precisely because they are sensitive to the questions at the expense of the easy answers that lie" (Faith1). Ketchin also goes on saying:

Betts's women face many huge questions on their trip to discover themselves. Some are answered, whereas others, not answered, leave space for the reader to get involved and think differently according to their vantage points and worldviews. This creates the enchanting mystery and the enduring genius of the novels of Doris Betts (4).

In *The Astronomer* (1966), the wife Eva runs away with another man, Fred, leaving her family like most of Betts's women. She escapes her domestic responsibilities to other similar responsibilities. But in this case, she believes she has found the life she is looking for. Fred used to read maps but is overwhelmed by them: "Everything turns into a map for Fred" (178). Eva runs away from physical life but cannot live into the imaginary, map-based life of Fred.

Finally, she realizes that all straight lines on the map of the world are curved. Everything in life has its unjust part. These are not straight on the map of life. When Eva escapes searching for happiness, she has an illegal abortion and nearly dies. As a result, she resorts to the Bible to search for forgiveness. Yet she realizes that religious books tell people what the right things are, but in her opinion, they do not tell people how to do them. Hence, she decides to accept and face the curved lines in life. She admits her weaknesses and gets support from religion to live with crises. Through this adjustment, she gets the power to change and achieve identity. She realized that happiness is not a condition, but it is a decision. “I am going to make myself happy” (233). Betts’s women, in short, realize that the ability to acknowledge weaknesses, face them, and get support from religion is the only secure and stable way towards gaining an identity.

In *The Scarlet Thread* (1965), Allen escapes from life into religion. She doesn’t help her husband and her kids being busy with prayers and isolation. So, she doesn’t understand how to get inspiration from religion to help her perform her duties and realize her identity better. Betts here says that religion occasionally doesn’t help women to overcome their problems and face responsibilities. This way of dealing with religion is not helpful or practical.

In the short story “*The Ugliest Pilgrim*” (1973), Betts stresses the point that religion is helpful when women face their realities head-on instead of clinging to the desperate notion that prayer, by itself, will suffice. In this story, Violet Karl, who has a big defect in her face due to a childhood accident, goes on a pilgrimage to Oklahoma to treat her ugliness by an Evangelical faith healer. When he fails to turn her beautiful, she does not lose faith but rather strengthens it by accepting her defect and defying the problem instead of succumbing to it. Finally, she learns to

live by establishing a new strong identity that can bear troubles and face problems without losing faith, love, and peace of mind.

As we note in these examples, Betts's women are divided internally into physical and spiritual self. They are torn between the ideal woman and the hidden passionate woman. They concurrently possess good and wholesome but yet transgressive and even evil identities. Everyone has two struggling and opposing natures—the apparent good self and the hidden, evil one. People often hide their evil desires—what we may call the inner secret self or the world of darkness inside everyone—behind the good appearance. They hide these rebellious desires and passions which are pitted against social norms. The suppression of these desires creates disappointment that comes from the realization that these real and felt needs cannot be declared, tended to, or fulfilled. This is of course a distressing realization.

Betts's women are classic Southern people who rediscover themselves through the journey deep inside their inner upheavals, through facing other people, and through interacting with society bravely. This painstaking process enables them to forge new identities and become better people. Through their intimidating and arduous journey into the labyrinth of their complicated selves, they manage to protect their existence against the outer world which threatens at every turn to consume, overwhelm, and destroy them.

On the other hand, real human beings must be stable from inside his heart, mind, emotions, and character. All his elements of identity must unite and harmonize. He must be psychologically strong and never hesitate or get confused or fearful. Whatever happens around him, he must control it with wisdom and without

melting in it and never get weakened inside and never lose hope or faith despite all the problems and obstacles. These are the character traits and personality tendencies of Betts's strongest and most ennobling protagonists.

The most important characteristic of the human being, however, is to be successful internally and externally. He must be successful in life and in his mind and heart and above all in his relationship with God. He must have a strong self that doesn't hesitate, get confused, or get scared. Whatever he faces in life, he must be undeterred and straightway pursue his most lofty and endearing goals. This means that he cannot allow weaknesses or failure to thwart him. In this way, he will not lose faith, initiative, or his resolution for success despite the innumerable obstacles he faces. The real success—the grandest of all—is a spiritual success, even if that success is in some sense materialistic, it still must be spiritually obtained and spiritually harnessed.

Welcoming Death: (*Souls Raised from the Dead*)

Betts's women, strangely, suffer from an inability to understand the modern world. Through death, the living women, ironically, realize the dead parts of their own personalities and, once recognized for what they are, they are in a position to renew them. The second-wave feministic ideas appear clearly in *Souls Raised from the Death*; Betts's female complete rejection of family obstacles is explicitly revealed in the novel *Souls Raised from the Dead* (1994) when Mary, the sick little girl, finds her lost identity in the final destination of death.

Mary is an innocent girl facing the monster of death with its cruelty and pains. All her members of the family suffer from spiritual pains because of their inability to

do anything to protect their youngest and innocent member from her destined death.

People in this story reconcile with their family fate. However, a selfish family member—in this case, her mother Christine—is always present whose guilt allows her to leave her family and her ill daughter. Although she knows that she is the only one who can rescue her daughter's life by donating her kidney, she refuses to help her own daughter, thereby thwarting her maternal instinct. This is second-wave feminism; refusing to be an ideal mother sacrificing herself for the sake of her child.

The face of Mary on her death bed is more beautiful— “light and sweet”—than ever before in her life. Here Betts says that Mary is domiciled in Heaven and looks happy, content, and fulfilled in her last destination. This heaven, not earth, is her ultimate destination. Betts intimates that many people suffer a great deal in this world because they do not belong to the earth and, thus, only find rest and comfort in Heaven. Death, then, is the gate to their real and final destination. When the physical body dies, the soul starts to live in a way it never could on earth. The earthly sufferings hinder the soul's optimum realization and keep it from soaring high and rising to its natural habitat. It is only when the body dies that the soul rises to potentiate fully and brilliantly.

In this novel, in short, Betts's characters find their real identities through death, and the soul is loosed from its long imprisonment, suffering, and death on earth. This is the rebirth of everyone's inner self, the revival of his real humanity. Betts says that sooner or later all of us will be “souls raised from the dead,” regardless of

our conditions in life, the extent of our suffering, and our inability to live vibrantly, spontaneously, and freely.

Christine's refusal to give her daughter one of her kidneys raises a debate about the rights and duties of women in their families. Jennifer Martin mentions the example that *Steel Magnolias* provide that Christine's community expects of her in this situation: "In Shelby, the married daughter of M'Lynn, needs a kidney transplant, and M'Lynn is ready to selflessly offer her own kidney to her daughter. She says, 'I'm happy. Look at the opportunity I have. Most mothers only get the chance to give their child life once. I get a chance to do it twice. ..I've got two kidneys and I only need one' " (Martin 48). Betts herself, in the interview with Susan Ketchin, describes Christine's rejection to donate her kidney to her daughter as child abuse. "That little story... [*Souls Raised from the Dead*] about doing something inexcusable to a child" (259). In this community at that time it was difficult for a woman not to keep sacrificing for the sake of her children as the way a woman performs in her family determines her quality and social position.

Doris Betts here is presenting a self-involved feminist, whose desire to pursue a separate identity for herself, is dangerous and selfish which goes against female maternal nature of giving and sacrificing themselves for the sake of their children's lives as the mother's refusal to donate her kidney to the daughter causes her death. Betts' Christine represents the harmful exaggeration of the feministic behavior with mothers and children. Betts explains that feminism sometimes leads to banishing women because they do not follow the social and family norms. Doris Betts's women discover themselves as failure, ambivalent, abandoning their children and leaving their maternal roles to other family members. As Mary's

mother did when she rejected to give her kidney to her daughter to rescue her life and ran away escaping the role of a perfect model of a mother. Another type of Doris's women is Tacey, Frank's mother and Mary's grandmother, represents the opposite morals of Christine. Tacey offers the favorable morals for the society. That is why she refused Christine's behavior, considering it selfishness and childish: "The fact was: Christine was childish; she had stopped paying attention to any of life's hard lessons in her early teens..." (*Souls* 253). Tacey's religious and social bringing up makes her hold the idealistic female morals of the community which are all concerned with her role in the family as a daughter, as a wife and as a mother:

Lord, you might as well forgive me for being a snob-it's what they call a besetting sin. Not that her own Grovers hadn't been poor themselves, uneducated, rural, the older ones as far below her present level of taste as she was below that of people who liked opera and poetry. But the Broomes fell below them all- below Average, below Common, below Tacky. The Broomes were trashy. (41)

Despite her religious ideas, Tacey is criticizing the Broomes. Her identity shows Betts's complicated female characters in her novels. Despite her piety, she allows herself to judge people. She could not also forgive Christine for not donating her kidney to Mary. Yet, Tacey's faith makes her comfortable particularly when Mary died. While Frank, Mary's father was driving all night not being able to sleep, Tacey was feeling peaceful and comfortable.

Mary, the sick daughter, is another type of Betts's women who is ill, weak and helpless. Despite Frank's many trials to give her passion and feelings, he never compensates Christine, her mother. Mary used to remember her mother's feelings

and care for her. Even Mary has dreams of the ideas about her mother: “Naturally none of the doctors or nurses or family members knew that she had only dreamed them into this convincing but temporary existence, any more than the real Christine at the picnic could have guessed how often in Mary’s dreams she lived out a perfect mother’s role” (187). Mary’s needs from her mother were always simple and childish as she needs her time and attention while Christine left her, when she was teenager, to work as a makeup seller. Betts here shows another part of selfishness in Christine’s personality; the lack of general motherly giving and care. Frank mentions how Christine behaves towards him and his lost kidney in an accident as a soldier: “With Christine you’ve got to talk about *now*. She’s got no talent for promises... See, what happened is that Christine just forgot all about my kidney damage because that emergency passed, and other things took her time right then” (152). That is why Frank could not donate his kidney to his own daughter, Mary. Betts displays Frank as the opposite male figure to Christine through his concern and perfection to the social norms. Frank tries his best as an ideal father to help his daughter: “When I look up that hill all I see is kidneys walking by, everybody but Mary with two healthy kidneys. Old kidneys, young kidneys. For a change, Christine’s don’t look any better than average- I bet she’s got two goddamn ugly kidneys- but right now they’re the best kidneys in the crowd, the first-prize solid-gold kidneys” (152-153). Frank keeps his good manners till the end of the novel. Even after the loss of his daughter and his devastation by her death, he behaves as an idealistic husband too. Despite Christine’s rejection from everyone around her and despite her social rejection, only Frank accepts and justifies her. All women in the novel refuse Christine’s situation towards her daughter and her lack of motherly sacrifice. Yet, Frank is willing to forgive her offering her sympathy and support.

Betts's women, not reacting normally, rebel against communal rejection and shame, taking on moral choices with all their unbearable consequences and insisting on achieving their own characters and discovering their lost selves. Despite the mystery, difficulty, and rejection they face, they keep struggling and insist on the path of self-discovery and self-illumination. They may not succeed in their relationships with others and they may not succeed in their heady and quixotic quest, but they fulfill their deep desire for a change and for creating autonomous and wonderfully independent identities, thereby achieving happiness through keeping themselves involved in life. The following is a fitting concluding assessment of the rich and too often unexplored terrain of Doris Betts's fictional landscape.

The quest for identity is a process motivated by misplacement, confusion, and uncertainty. Unfortunately, it often leaves those who experience it in a similar state of personal disarray, roaming forever in a no man's land, belonging to neither group. Others become fanatics, zealots of their new culture or religion. Very few succeed to become full-fledged, normal members of a new cultural group, but these dim chances do not deter members from embarking on a process of choice, since those who learn to see the fractions in their culture, and the attraction is hidden in other ways of lives cannot ignore this insight. They are doomed to carry these images for the rest of their lives. It is in this sense that there is no route back from reflectiveness. (Tamir 184)

Conclusion

Thinking deeply of Betts's female characters, one discovers that they flee from Southern domestic responsibilities into Western domestic responsibilities. At the same time, they escape from physical boundaries into, figuratively speaking, spiritual and emotional boundaries.

Women do not refuse family responsibilities, but they do refuse to melt into them and being controlled and defined by them. They do not refuse love, but rather they reject the selfishness that penetrates it incrementally through the drudgery of endless domestic daily duties. They escape into themselves from the outer, materialistic world into a more spiritual emotional inner world.

Southern women refuse to see their jobs as tedious drudgery; rather, they perceive themselves as loving guides who help others by their own informed choices which they cannot give up or ask for help one day. It is the company and members of the family who love, help and respect their women that sustain Betts's females. In this way, they create, nourish, and foster their identities through a loving and caring community.

When Betts's females return to their home and roots, they do so not as despicable failures but as new persons who have gained invaluable illumination and priceless experiences. Through these experiences, they process new realities, and they cope and creatively manage life instead of being controlled and dominated by it. Sometimes this involves running away from their past and present lives as a way of rescuing their future. After they develop and change, they return to their former cultures, stronger and able to confront and even save the future. Betts's women realize, finally, that they must keep their original identities and ameliorate them. In

one sense, this has the appearance of escaping into their origins—that is, their inner self. While they move to the new places for materialistic betterment, it's the old places that are undergirded with spiritual powers. As a result, the women realize that they must amalgamate the spiritual and physical identities into an astounding hybrid creation. In Betts, all women are healed despite their failure in life, but they are most content, happy, and settled when they achieved their identity, their home of belonging. The second wave of feminism has been targeted in the manuscript, while the human behavior features that are being targeted in the novels have the relevancy to the major features of second-wave feminism. The substantial change and development in their personalities enable them to give purpose and meaning to their former lives and, even more heroically, save their future too. In this regard, the adage is true: the push of the past and the pull of the future give purpose to the present.

Doris Betts's heroines' rebel against anything that does not help their identity to flourish. As we've noted, they sometimes escape to the West where they become strong and powerful. Other women escape inside themselves through imagination and feelings. Others escape through religion but not for motivation. Others isolate themselves from people which is another way of escaping from real life. Some, on the other hand, escape through their submissive way of accepting oppression and restrictions from their families. The common denominator of these quests is that Betts's women struggle through their escape journeys to find themselves as independent and fully functioning, autonomous identities. As a result of this sustained effort, they eventually change into new characters through the realization of themselves, of others, and of their society.

Betts's women realize, finally, that they are not so much discarding their old identities as enhancing and enriching them. This gives purpose to their flight from their environments and their concomitant journey into their own inner recesses. The relocation to the new places, moreover, provides them with much needed materialistic needs, even though the old places, with its defined mores, contain spiritual powers. Their daunting task, therefore, is to harmoniously blend the comforting spiritual underpinnings of their past existence with the improved physical conditions of the new existence. That successful conflation is what typifies the best and most astonishing of Betts's brave characters.

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